

A previously undescribed African race of the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

by P. A. Clancey

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The subspecies of the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* (Linnaeus) occurring in the southern third of Africa were last reviewed in Clancey (1961), when the populations breeding in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and in adjacent Mozambique were associated with *S. t. oreobates* Clancey, 1956: 40 miles E. of Maseru, Lesotho, at 2440 m a.s.l. On the receipt of better material this assignment was found to be incorrect, the Zimbabwean montane birds being both much shorter winged and less saturated than those of the Lesotho highlands, and in Clancey (1968) they were associated with the equally short-winged *S. t. promiscua* Hartert, 1922: Uluguru Mtns, eastern Tanzania. In Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1955) the range of *promiscua* is restricted to certain eastern highlands of Tanzania, which view is also that of Ripley (1964) and Britton *et al.* (1980), the latter giving the established range of *promiscua* as "Mpwapwa and Kilosa to the Mikumi National Park, the foothills of the Ulugurus and northern Iringa" at 500–1600 m a.s.l. A re-examination of the case shows that the eastern Zimbabwean and adjacent Mozambique montane populations differ from *promiscua* in that the male has the rufous of the venter extended down over the sides of the body to the flanks in breeding dress—the lower sides and flanks in *promiscua* being white as in *S. t. axillaris* (Shelley), 1882: Mt Kilimanjaro, northeastern Tanzania—while the female is light vinaceous-buff without a contrasting darker breast. Such elements are in effect closer to *S. t. stonei* Bowen, 1931: Vila General Machado, Bié, Angola, than they are to East and South African forms, but also differ from *stonei* sufficiently to bear a name of their own:

***Saxicola torquata altivaga*, subsp. nov.**

Type. ♂, adult. Banti Forest Reserve, S. of Mutare, Zimbabwe, at 19°20'S, 32°46'E, alt. 1750 m, 30 June 1973. Collected by Durban Natural History Museum personnel. In the collection of the Durban Museum, D.M. Reg. No. 28 942.

Adult male similar to that of *S. t. stonei* described from the central highlands of Angola, but differs by having the belly, crissum and under tail-coverts white and not light buff. Female also much as in *stonei*, but generally paler over the fore-throat and belly. Size smaller: mean of ♂ wing 67.2 v. 71.0 in *stonei*, ♀ wing 65.6 v. 68.8 mm.

Differs from races from still further south in Africa (*S. t. oreobates*, *S. t. torquata* and *S. t. clanceyi* Courtenay-Latimer, 1961: Wallekraal, Little Namaqualand) in its much smaller size and a range of distinguishing colour characters. In *S. t. oreobates* ♂ wing mean is 75.5, in ♀ is 71.2 mm.

Similar in size to *S. t. promiscua*, but male with ventral rufous extended laterally to the flanks, and female without a dark breast-band.

Measurements. Wings of 21 ♂♂, 66–69 (67.2), SD 1.36, tails 45–50 (47.6), SD 1.59; wings of 6 ♀♀, 64–66 (65.6), SD 0.40, tails 45–47 (46.0), SD 0.70.

In the case of *S. t. stonei* ♂♂, wings (of 12), 70–73 (71.0), SD 1.07, tails (of 8), 50–54 (51.0), SD 1.56; ♀♀ wings (of 11), 67.5–70 (68.8), SD 0.78, tails (of 8) 48.5–51.5 (50.0), SD 1.08 mm.

Material (paratypical). 27 (eastern highlands of Zimbabwe; Mt Gorongosa, Mozambique; northern Transvaal).

Range. The southern highlands of Malawi and adjacent northern Mozambique, and south of the Zambezi R. in the eastern frontier highlands of Zimbabwe from Inyanga to the Chimanimani Range and the Melsetter district, and south of the Limpopo R. in the northern highlands of the Transvaal (to Woodbush, Tzaneen). Also Mt Gorongosa in southern Mozambique.

Measurements of the Type. Wing (flattened) 66, tail 46 + mm.

Etymology. *Altivaga*, Latin, a roamer of the montane heights.

Remarks. With the restriction of the range of *S. t. promiscua* to eastern Tanzania, and the separation of the montane breeding populations resident from southern Malawi to eastern Zimbabwe, adjacent Mozambique and the northern Transvaal as a new race (*S. t. altivaga*), the status of *promiscua* is materially altered. It requires to be seen as a reasonably stable localized intermediate or linking form between the southern subspecies complex in which males have the ventral white largely restricted to the mid-venter, crissum and under tail-coverts, and east and northeastern African elements, the males of which are much more extensively white below. Examples resembling typical *promiscua* crop up in populations far to the west of its established range in Angola and adjacent western Zaïre, where the ranges of *S. t. stonei* and *S. t. salax* (Verreaux & Verreaux), 1851: Gabon, converge (M. A. Traylor *in litt.* to Clancey 1961). It is significant in this regard to note that *S. t. promiscua*, *S. t. altivaga* and *S. t. salax* are small-sized forms, replaced to the south and northeast by longer winged taxa. In the case of *S. t. axillaris*, with which *S. t. promiscua* is juxtaposed, wings in ♂♂ measure 70–76 (72.5), SD 2.31 in 7 specimens. In *S. t. salax* 4 ♂♂ measure 65–66 (65.3), 2 ♀♀ 65, 66 mm, being thus much smaller than *S. t. stonei*.

There is no evidence that *S. t. altivaga* is subject to post-breeding movement on any scale, but *S. t. stonei*, which replaces it at lower elevations and in drier country to the west, is an established local migrant, individuals ranging to the eastern and southeastern lowlands during the southern winter (see Clancey 1961). Two specimens from Mt Selinda, at the southern extremity of the eastern frontier highlands of Zimbabwe, in the collection of the Durban Natural History Museum taken in early June, 1973, are clearly *stonei*, the ♂ with a wing of 71 and tail of 50.5, the ♀ with a wing of 70 and tail of 50 + mm. They are evidently migrants, as other Mt Selinda specimens to hand are *altivaga*.

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A new subspecies of Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena* from Israel

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During research on *Sylvia* warblers, a special study of the Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena* was made in the field and by ringing in the Arava Valley, Israel, and by comparative examination of skins from Israel and those in the collection at the British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH).

The Arabian Warbler, also known as Blanford's Warbler or Red Sea Warbler, was originally described by Hemprich & Ehrenberg (1833) and placed in the genus *Curruca*. Hartert (1917) placed it in *Parisoma*, and Meinertzhagen (1949) and all following authors placed it in the genus *Sylvia*. Afik (1984) doubted that it was a Sylvid warbler since its biological and some morphological characteristics differ from other members of the genus *Sylvia*. I believe that the Arabian Warbler is a species intermediate between the 2 genera *Parisoma* and *Sylvia*, but closer to the latter, where it is best left, at least at present.

The Arabian Warbler occurs on both sides of the Red Sea—in Arabia, Somalia and Sudan (Harrison 1982, Jennings 1981, Hall & Moreau 1970, Archer & Godman 1961)—in dry subtropical desert or semidesert, favouring acacia trees or large bushes near acacia trees.

There are 3 distinct subspecies, all rather similar:—

S.l. leucomelaena (Hemprich & Ehrenberg 1833). Distributed in southern and western Arabia north to 26°N, also possibly in Somalia. It is the darkest and largest of the 3 races (Table 1). Hartert (1917) described the birds collected in South Yemen as “*distincta*”, but it is now considered that all birds found in the Arabian peninsula are *S.l. leucomelaena*. This population is the one nearest to Israel.

S.l. blanfordi (Seeböhm 1878). Distributed along the western Red Sea border from Sudan to Eritrea. Upperparts sandier greyish-brown, head very dark brown with a sharp division from the paler mantle, a contrast which is lacking in *leucomelaena* and *somaliensis*. The wing in *blanfordi* is the smallest, though there is still overlap with both *leucomelaena* and *somaliensis* (Table 1).